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The Professional Development Needs of Educational Leaders in Post-Conflict Kosovo

by J. Tim Goddard

Abstract

This article discusses the professional development needs of educational leaders in Kosovo, a region in Yugoslavia that has undergone dramatic changes following conflicts in the late 1990s. This article describes the changing sociopolitical context of the region and examines the need for professional development programs for school administrators in a postwar society.

The professional development of school administrators in a post-conflict environment is fraught with difficulty (Goddard 2003; 2005; 2006). Working in what are often called “learning organizations,” school directors (or principals) serve as the leaders of these communities of learning and of learners. However, the organization of the school functions within a wider cultural, linguistic, and sociopolitical arena. Within that arena, the aftermath of conflict most significantly influences the educational process.

Until recently, Kosovo was a member of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Since the war of 1999 and the subsequent separation of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) into distinct nation-states, Kosovo has undergone dramatic changes in the political, cultural, economic, and social levels of its society. The educational system has not been exempt from these changes.

This article explores issues related to the professional development needs of educational leaders in the resource-deficient, post-conflict environment of a contemporary, formerly socialist society. Based upon his experiences in Kosovo from 2001–2007, the author has identified five factors that are integral to professional development programs for educational leaders functioning in the Balkans and other postwar environments, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. These factors also served as

the framework for the Annual Meeting of the University Council of Educational Administration in Portland, Oregon in 2003.

Context

Following the death of President Tito in 1980, the eight federal units within Yugoslavia began to have visions of independence (Cviic 1997). These units were the republics of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia, and the two autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina (Ramet 1996). The autonomous provinces were considered politically as being part of a greater Serbia, and nationalistic ideas for statehood were not considered legitimate by the governing elite. Nonetheless, these ideas persisted and, in 1981, the Albanian majority in Kosovo held a series of demonstrations demanding that their province be granted the status of republic (Anzulovic 1999). These petitions were ignored by the government, but signaled a new militancy among the Albanian Kosovars.

In 1989, on the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo where, in 1389, Serbian forces were defeated by the Ottoman Turks, Yugoslav President Milošević returned to the battlefield and made his infamous speech demanding a greater Serbian state. The following year, the Serbian army was deployed in Kosovo. Ramet (1996, 39) reported:

In a series of measures, he [Milošević] dismantled the autonomy of the provinces, subordinated them to the Serbian legislature and court system, shut down the provincial assembly in Kosovo (an illegal move on his part), ordered the arrest of the duly elected members of the now-banned Kosovo Assembly and, finally, suppressed Kosovo's major Albanian-language daily newspaper.

These events were followed by the imposition of more draconian measures. Many ethnic Albanian educators were fired from their positions, Albanian language and textbooks were banned in schools, and many Kosovars were prevented from attending school (Clark 2000). Elsie (1997, 152) reported that by 1992 the Albanian population of Kosovo had "been cast into limbo to starve in what is already the poorhouse of the European continent."

Toward the end of the decade, Albanian students had withdrawn from public schools and a parallel system of education had been established (Clark 2000). Students were harassed if they were observed in groups of more than three people, so they traveled independently and met clandestinely in their teachers' homes for classes (R. Ademi, pers. comm.). In a letter written July 14, 2001, H. Dulai recounted witnessing, in 1999, a Serbian paramilitary unit making an Albanian school principal and three other community leaders stand in the hot sun for five hours, haranguing them in front of students before shooting them.

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As the former Yugoslavia disintegrated, incidents of civil unrest and human rights abuse increased. Many Albanian Kosovars simply disappeared, and widespread oppression occurred. A mass exodus of Kosovar refugees ensued, and the situation deteriorated to the point that foreign intervention was considered necessary.

In 1999, a military campaign by NATO resulted in the withdrawal of the Serbian army and the return of civil government under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). With the Albanian Kosovars' return to power, many Kosovar Serbs found themselves in danger and many left Kosovo. Those who remained now live in enclaves under armed UN protection. The population of Kosovo in 2006 was estimated to be 2.25 million people, of whom 90 percent are of Albanian ethnicity, 7 percent are Serbian, and 3 percent are from the Ashkali, Bosniak, Gorani, Roma, and Turkish communities.

The Kosovo Educator Development Project (KEDP) was conceived and implemented shortly after the UN reestablished civil government in the region. The Faculty of Education and the International Centre at the University of Calgary and Universalia Management Group of Montreal are partners in this project, which is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. The goal of KEDP is to contribute to the development of an inclusive, learner-centered education system that models respect and peaceful coexistence. Within this broad goal, six specific objectives have been identified:

- to help promote a conducive, enabling environment for educator development;
- to help develop sustainable in-service education training resources and facilities;
- to help establish a Faculty of Education at the University of Prishtina;
- to develop regional programming that connects Kosovar educators with their counterparts in other countries;
- to help build capacity among local nongovernmental agencies and organizations; and
- to work cooperatively with other agencies and donors involved in educator development in Kosovo.

The role, preparation, and continued professional development of school administrators are core to all six objectives.

The Need for Professional Development

Major systemic change demands new types of organizational structures and individual approaches. Though Catana (2003, 44) argued that "organizational change at the cultural level begins with individual change," to expect people to simply change their attitudes and expectations overnight is unrealistic. When an established way of doing things has existed for many generations, habits are difficult to break. This situation is not unique to Kosovo. Pasalic-Kreso and Russo (2000, 107) related, "In the postwar transitional phase, the movement toward restoring a comprehensive educational system in Bosnia has been impeded by the lack of basic resources and facilities." Such impediments exist in Kosovo and are exacerbated by the learned worldview of many educational leaders. Catana (2003, 30) noted:

A common and fundamental attribute of nonparticipative, ruled societies is that ruling authorities have power over, control of, or decide for others who are perceived in some way as less important, less valued, less able, or less entitled. This deeply embedded attribute and belief structure is characteristic of the historic leadership, management, and educational practice in the eastern and southeastern European region. As a fundamental principle of leadership based on democratic values, participation and collaborative processes from common core values, while sustaining the power of diverse perspectives, is key.

Leaders must be aware of the need to change the values and belief systems of people and to do this in ways that are open, collaborative, and respectful. Fullan (2003, 39) argued that educational leadership must be considered as a “tri-level reform” that takes place at school, district (municipal), and state levels. Leaders at all levels must be involved in the educational reform process. Hoffmann and Johnston (2005, 16) stated, “Meaningful professional development is best when it is peer-to-peer and imbedded directly in the work principals do.” The role of the central or public administration is to provide the environment where changes can take place.

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In turn, the leader moves from being one who directs operations to one who guides and facilitates operations. A move from “informed prescription” transpires, where the state draws upon best practice research and dictates what needs to be done, to the idea of “informed professional judgment,” which not only permits but encourages individual autonomy (Fullan 2003, 4–5). As Kosovo developed its own educational systems and practices, it moved from the state-directed structures of the past to democratic structures that enabled leaders at all levels of the organization to make decisions, to act on those decisions, and to take responsibility for those decisions.

To be effective in this type of role, however, individuals require intensive professional development to ensure that they have the skills necessary to conceive of and implement these types of changes. Unfortunately, in many post-conflict societies, the educational infrastructure has been destroyed (Basic Education Coalition 2004). Southworth (2003) noted that two of the three research priorities of the National College of School Leadership in England were sustainability and leadership within the arenas of cultural and ethnic diversity. These priorities have equal urgency in the post-socialist communities of southeastern Europe. When diversity is founded on dissent and conflict, the prioritization of educational leadership and sustainable reform are crucial.

Working within a “geology of the unconscious” (James 2003)—a term used to describe the environment that has resulted from severe disruption and tumult over the past decade—educational leaders in these countries are indeed influenced by the past. Directed reform, which leads to changes in entrenched administrative behaviors and practices, is essential (Browne-Ferrigno and Allen 2006). The leadership skills which are developed must be sustainable over time and must be transferable across “arenas of cultural and ethnic diversity” (Southworth 2003) if they are to have applicability in post-conflict societies. The professional development of educational leaders in Kosovo has utility and applicability for those engaged in educational reform in other countries in the region and in other post-conflict societies around the world.

KEDP Partners

The information for this paper was collected over a 28-month period (June 2001–October 2003). The KEDP initially formed a liaison with just Albanian Kosovar educators, but later included educators from the minority communities of Ashkali, Bosniak, Gorani, Roma, and Serbia. The discussion here, however, is based only on relationships with Albanian Kosovar educators. To ensure the accuracy of the KEDP’s interpretation, Kosovar educators reviewed the information.

The KEDP has worked to effect program and structural reform that reflect new ideas and practices in education. One step in this effort has been to ensure that all of the Albanian Kosovar school directors (n=750) have taken an Introduction to Educational Leadership course. Recently, 30 Serbian school directors also took the course.

Over the past five years, networks of school directors, teachers, and others engaged in specific reform initiatives also have been established and supported. These networks are critical to sustainable educational reform because they provide the means for principals to discuss ideas and strategies with their colleagues (Hoffmann and Johnston 2005). Through action research projects associated with their training program, the Kosovar school directors identified teacher training, school organization, school facilities and supplies, community, students, and educational reform as the critical areas of concern in the redevelopment of education in Kosovo (Goddard and Fagnou 2002). Given that certain groups are particularly disadvantaged, emphasis has been placed on the role of school leaders in the education of girls, women, youth, and minorities.

As a result of its involvement with school directors in Kosovo, the KEDP has specified five questions that must be answered to ensure the professional development of educational leaders.

Critical Questions

What policies most effectively support the professional development of educational leaders? Schools are accountable to many audiences and to various and often competing power structures. Educational leaders have moral obligations to their students and staff members, professional obligations to their colleagues, and contractual obligations to the Ministry of Education. They work in a policy environment that is replete with difficulties. These competing needs make professional development seem an intrusion rather

than a needed catalyst for reform. In situations such as this, centrally initiated efforts to change the culture of administrative practice often are necessary (Browne-Ferrigno and Allen 2006).

Educators in Kosovo are paid only approximately 300 euros per month, forcing many to work additional jobs to survive. To expect these teachers voluntarily to sacrifice working time to participate in professional development—a situation which is compounded when professional development sessions are held in regional centers and participants must travel long distances over difficult roads to attend—is unrealistic. In effect, professional development comes at a significant personal cost to all participants. Many donor agencies argue that in the West (broadly defined as the industrialized capitalist states of the G8 collective), educators are willing to match the investment of their employers. For example, if an in-service program takes place on a Friday and Saturday, the participant is absent with pay on Friday and donates his or her time on Saturday. The registration fee and the cost of accommodations might be covered by the employer, but travel expenses are the responsibility of the employee. Such sharing is dependent on the participant having the money to invest in his or her future. Such an assumption cannot be made in Kosovo.

In general, Kosovo suffers from a lack of qualified teachers. Many Albanian teachers left during the 1990s, either as voluntary emigrants or as involuntary refugees. Though some have returned, many have remained in the countries where they spent the war years. During the period that they were away, a number of other, often unqualified, teachers filled the breach. With minimal training and often with no classrooms or resources, these teachers maintained the education system during the dark years of the late 1990s. Following the cessation of hostilities, the teachers who “stepped in” expected to be retained and retrained by the incoming administration. They were somewhat perturbed when qualified teachers who had spent the decade outside Kosovo were encouraged to return and resume their teaching positions.

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The low number of qualified teachers from the cultural and linguistic minority groups, particularly the Ashkali, Roma, and Gorani people, is another issue. When Kosovo was the poorest and most marginalized of the regions of FRY, these groups were marginalized within that region. These minority groups have remained outcasts to this day. Special programs that actively seek to identify and train members of these minority groups and place them in positions of visible authority in the education system are needed.

What roles do major educational stakeholders have in supporting professional development for educational leaders? Any civil society requires that “healthy independent

organizations (e.g., political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and business associations) serve as mediating structures between government and the citizens” (DeHoog and Racanska 2003, 265). Such structures were anathema to the state-directed systems that existed in FRY. The socialist model of FRY that existed during the Tito years was the “golden age” to which many Albanian Kosovars still refer. The role models of that era are remembered with affection and are often the hidden scaffolding that supports the public face of education.

According to Lester Salamon (in DeHoog and Racanska 2003), different constructs of a civil society exist. The first is that nongovernmental organizations are in opposition to the government and take an independent and critical stance to provide alternative services and opinions. The second construct is that such organizations are agents of the state and exist to ensure compliance and control of a highly regulated populace that is cooperative to protect its own interests. The third construct is that of the nongovernmental sector in partnership with the government—a collaborative and collegial engagement that ensures dialogue and communication through supportive networks.

In Kosovo, local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as SBASH-K (the teachers’ union) and the Kosovo Education Centre, believe that they are operating in a partnership role, but that the government sees them as being in opposition. Conversely, the government believes that these NGOs ought to be agents of the state and, by not accepting this role, are resisting legitimate authority. Such perceived resistance serves as justification for describing these organizations as oppositional to the government.

These conflicts play themselves out in both overt and covert ways. The Ministry is perceived to have a distinct lack of interest in the entire area of teacher certification. International donor agencies are frustrated because a common framework within which certification might occur does not exist; therefore, each program delivers its own specific certificate. Educators are angry because they are required to take professional development sessions that often end up costing them money, yet no financial benefits (in the form of salary adjustments) result from the programs.

A coherent framework for professional development is needed in Kosovo. Whether or not this is mandated and moderated by the Ministry or by an organization, such as an in-service training institute that operates at arm’s length from the Ministry, requires further discussion. Nonetheless, the Ministry must ensure that professional development is monitored and regularized to avoid laments such as “The teachers are spending too much time training and not enough time teaching” (M. Elshani, pers. comm.).

What creative responses can overcome situational barriers that impede professional development for administrators? Responses to the new laws developed in Kosovo must be relevant. However, this relevancy becomes difficult when the law itself is the impediment to professional development, particularly the curriculum. In a socialist state, a tendency exists to view curricula texts as propaganda for the purposes of indoctrination—a process that results in a particular understanding of history. In an emerging post-socialist, post-conflict democracy such as Kosovo, textbooks and other curriculum materials must pay

attention to multiple perspectives on history (Zajda and Zajda 2003). In the same manner, professional development requires a high degree of transparency within the wider community. When educators are attending professional development sessions, they must visibly and publicly demonstrate how this information will help children learn.

Bottery (2003) drew a distinction between the educational entrepreneur and the advocate of the welfare state. When the Western capitalist democracy is introduced into a controlled-state environment, tensions emerge. The professional development opportunities offered to educators by non-state agencies can be perceived as antistate, oppositional, and perhaps contrary to the wishes of the governing elite. Steps into the bright new world of democracy must be carefully monitored and—sometimes explicitly—controlled. The entrepreneurs of professional development must tread carefully to avoid antagonizing the policy makers who feel threatened by the possibility of a free-thinking cadre of policy implementers (O. Buleshkaj, pers. comm.). Orchestrating planned change is difficult when ad hoc events are emerging on their own accord.

Investing in study tours that help people discover what is possible in other jurisdictions also is essential. In development work, a tendency exists to restrict such opportunities to senior level officers within the bureaucracy. This often is a serious mistake. Though central administrative support is essential for reform, only grassroots initiatives make sustainable reform possible. The danger lies in the isolation of reform initiatives, with changes that occur due to “incremental transformation rather than grand policy design” (Greve 2003, 277).

How are social justice and educational equity issues addressed in leadership professional development programs in light of marginalized ethnic minority communities, internally displaced persons, and returning refugees? Hanberger (2003, 29) stated, “Policy processes are dynamic processes that take place in a fluid political and organizational environment where more than one line of rationality appears.” One aspect of a post-socialist society is the bureaucratic remnant of the public service that still seeks approval before taking action and is too traumatized to be active. Rather, the bureaucrats take a reactive, passive pose that requires them to wait until someone gives them the appropriate directive. During these times, the fluidity of the environment achieves the viscosity of molasses.

In Kosovo, discussions about the need for democracy, such as laws and practices that reflect the statutes of the human rights convention or the Helsinki accord on children’s rights, are prevalent. Such talk, however, is not always supported by policy, nor does it reflect the realities of life for the dispersed rural population. During conflict, education provides a sense of normalcy and psychological security for many students, and a carefully constructed curriculum can help teach critical survival skills (Basic Education Coalition 2004). However, the enactment of post-conflict reforms sometimes ignores these tenets and bypasses the period required for an effective healing process.

In 2003, the Kosovo government enacted a law that mandated grade nine as a compulsory program in schools. To minimize the strain on already crowded elementary schools, grade

nine would be an additional grade at all existing high schools. In one remote district, where only one high school operated in the regional center, problems ensued. When 84 grade eight students graduated from an elementary school in a large village 25 kilometers to the south, they were faced with a trip on an unpaved road that took nearly 75 minutes, even when traveling by a new four-wheel drive jeep. A public transport system was not available, other than private taxicabs, which were generally entrepreneurial and individual in nature. When it snowed, the road was closed until the local detachment of the UN security force decided to plow it. Though the Senior Education Officer for the region protested the restructuring policy, he was informed that it would be implemented in all districts.

In another region, when the author asked for suggestions on how to integrate children from minority cultural groups into the education system, he was met with silence. Though school directors agreed that education could serve as the bridge between different communities, such as the Ashkalis and Serbians, and that children should learn the habits of cooperation and friendship, no specific strategies were offered. Eventually one principal spoke up, "This is not yet the time. How can I invite the children from that family to my school when I know that the father's brother was the one who murdered my sister during the war?" When asked, "When will be the time?" everyone simply shrugged.

How might professional development programs prepare school leaders to promote learning and success for all children, regardless of their cultural, ethnic, or religious affiliations? The professional development programs that are delivered in a post-conflict society must recognize and react to the reality of the conflict. To have an Albanian school system and a parallel, but separate, system for ethnic minorities is not the answer. As Solomon (2002, 174) observed within the North American context, "A history of differential schooling for racial minorities such as Aborigines, Africans, and Asians has continued to prejudice them as marginal to the political and socioeconomic mainstream of everyday life." Professional development programs must realize that educators are not value-neutral, but instead hold deep, sincerely held beliefs that may run counter to the espoused desire for a democratic society.

Solomon (2002, 177) argued that school leaders must be "critical, transformative, educative, [and] ethical" in their practice. In Kosovo, such skills have not been part of the organizational culture for many years. Research (Hoffmann and Johnston 2005, 17) showed that "most changes in leadership behavior that ultimately lead to successful innovations in the school resulted from the principal changing the way he or she viewed a problem or an opportunity." Only through professional development programs that move beyond skills and expertise to discussions of the values, beliefs, and shared understandings of human beings will true educational leaders emerge. These discussions must continue beyond the formal periods of structured professional development and become part of an ongoing dialogue among educational leaders. Such goals will require an innovative, perhaps revolutionary, approach to professional development.

Conclusion

Interactions between school leadership and societal development in a post-conflict environment with limited, if any, educational resources are complex. Those responsible

for the professional development of educational leaders must develop their own understandings concerning these interactions.

In research conducted among ethnoculturally diverse administrators in a large urban Canadian school district, Solomon (2002, 191) determined that “in most preparation programs, issues of one’s own racial identity development and its potential impact on schooling in racially diverse communities are not explored.” When one’s identity and perception of the identity of others is forged in the crucible of war, then professional development programs must place this topic front and center.

Normal topics of professional development still have a role to play in professional development programs. Administrators everywhere need to know about change theory, strategic planning, and effective management skills. Educators around the world grapple with issues of curriculum objectivity, lesson content, student assessment, and teacher evaluation (Hoffmann and Johnston 2005; Browne-Ferrigno and Allen 2006).

In a post-conflict environment, however, care must be taken to incorporate a more rigorous social agenda than may normally be the case. School leaders in Kosovo are faced with traditional assumptions and beliefs about gender and age roles that are not the norm in most North American or Western European communities. They have experienced role and identity conflict based on ethnicity and religion—conflict that has resulted in many deaths and large numbers of internally displaced people. They have struggled through a deteriorating economic climate and are now facing personal financial difficulties that are seldom experienced in other, more economically privileged states. To be effective, professional development programs not only must incorporate, but also must highlight these cross-cutting themes and be designed with the intent of providing participants with a safe and supportive environment in which to discuss these issues among their peers.

The issues of professional development for educational leaders in post-conflict societies are not restricted to Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The dispossessed and the downtrodden are everywhere, and our work must not only explore, but also actively promote creativity, emotion, and passion.

Only through professional development programs that move beyond skills and expertise to discussions of the values, beliefs, and shared understandings of human beings will true educational leaders emerge.

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If you are interested in further discussion of the ways and means by which professional development programs might better prepare current and aspiring educational leaders to promote learning and success for children in minority and ethnoculturally diverse school contexts, please contact the author at goddard@ucalgary.ca.

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